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EDITORIAL COMMENT

A NATION-WIDE ART



DURING my recent travels through our scenic West, I was moved to wonder what would be the ultimate effect upon our art and literature of those great heights and depths and spaces, those clear skies and living waters, those colors incredible and magnificent. For, in spite of a few pioneers, we have not yet taken possession of our inheritance, entered into our kingdom.

Mark Twain was the greatest of our continental adventurers, of course. His *Life on the Mississippi* is an epic of the great river which puts it on the map of art even as the *Iliad* placed Troy there, and *Don Quixote* Spain. With this book American literature crossed the Mississippi. But although its author, and Bret Harte and Mary Austin and other writers of tales, John Muir and other essayists, and to a far less degree a few poets, have given us episodic glimpses into the vast region beyond, revealed something of its drama and poetry and mystery, they have as yet but skirted the edges of the new domain.

But some day American poets will become aware of all this magnificence of nature, as English poets have been aware of the sea, and their art will be inspired to a new richness, a new spaciousness. Of course, the long eastward gazing of our artists—their obstinate residence in the Atlantic states, their more obstinate preoccupation with the arts and liter-

atures of feudal Europe—all this cannot last much longer. They will be forced out of their corners, their prejudices, by those hardy pioneers—steel rails, journalism, moving pictures, popular tales and songs, local festivals, world's fairs, clamorous cities. At last they will have to follow the people, obey the people's need of them. They will have to "go west," leaving Europe, and even New Europe, behind. And in that day our art, our literature, will cease to be provincial, will resume the continental habit which began with Whitman and Mark Twain.

Who can measure, for example, the future spiritual influence of the Grand Cañon of Arizona—the architectonic effect of its beauty of structural line and subtly harmonized color? Years ago I wrote—in the *Atlantic* for December, 1899:

It is as though to the glory of nature were added the glory of art; as though, to achieve her utmost, the proud young world had commanded architecture to build for her and color to grace the building. The irregular masses of mountains, cast up out of the molten earth in some primeval war of elements, bear no relation to these prodigious symmetrical edifices, mounted on abysmal terraces and harmoniously grouped to give form to one's dreams of heaven. The sweetness of green does not last forever, but these mightily varied purples are eternal. All that grows and moves must perish, while these silent immensities endure. Lovely and majestic beyond the cunning of human thought, the mighty monuments rise to the sun as lightly as clouds that pass. And forever glorious and forever immutable, they must rebuke man's pride with the vision of ultimate beauty, and fulfil earth's dream of rest after her work is done.

That journey took me across the strange desert in a stage-coach, and ended in a log shack at Grand View. This year

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my sleeper brought me to sumptuous El Tovar, and Grand View, sixteen miles away, has been bought by Mr. William Randolph Hearst—doubtless for presentation to the people of the United States! Yet I was not content with the modern comforts: no longer was the Cañon mine alone—the world, whom I had invited, was there by the carload, the trainful, the million! Surely it was right, it must be—but my democracy was not equal to the strain. Oh, for a cave at Navajo Point, where never a tourist disturbs the solitude!—where, only ten years ago, I watched a thunderstorm stalk up and down the abyss, spreading a gray curtain behind the Temple of Vishnu that rose on purple terraces prodigious and sublime.

If the Cañon is not of this world—if it is, at one hour of the day or mood of the sky, a terraced Inferno of still fires, at another the crumbling capital of a dead planet, at another the New Jerusalem peopled by spirits of the blest—in the Yellowstone, in the Yosemite, we have this world in full joy, the old earth quickening her paces and singing for the dance. Nowhere else is she so alive—in the Yellowstone with fountains, in the Yosemite with cataracts. In the Yellowstone the prodigious variety of boiling waters shames the imagination. Out of the hot, dark earth they come—in pin-prick bubbles that sputter and spit, in little fairy fountains that spread their gauze over the rocks, in great geysers that spurt slowly out of their holes and then spring skyward on sparkling wings; and finally in the Giant, grandest of all, which darts up straight and tall as a sequoia, and plumes the

blue heavens with steam. And there are pools of every most brilliant hue, often shaped and dyed like flowers—hot blooms with stems to the hidden deeps of the earth. And at last, for a climax, the great Gorge, spread with color like the palette of God, sloping down vividly to the bright green river which foams into crystal far below.

The Yosemite was out of my range this year, but who that has once possessed its cliffs and cataracts can lose them? The valley means for me gleaming walls and domes of white granite, with great waters falling slenderly at every cleft; and the vast park above means flowery valleys between ranged white peaks, it means long tramps beside foaming rivers, nights under the pines, days of mountain trails over rocks and snow. One day, climbing out of the valley, I stopped for two hours under Upper Yosemite Fall, listening to its shout of triumph as it plunged sixteen hundred feet over the cliff. It was like a young Greek god poised white and tall against the rock, summoning snow-spirits from the heights to fill the air with wings.

Each of the falls has its own character. Bridal Veil is a wraith whose scarf of lace the wind spreads wide. Illillouette is a dancer, with foamy feet free as air. Nevada is a princess, white-fingered, leaping into the sturdy arms of Vernal, who shouts as he carries her to his cave.

But if I talked of Lac Léman and the Matterhorn more of my readers would follow me. Some day all this glory will belong to all the world. Who will be its interpreters to the world—our poets and artists, or our journalists, photograph-

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ers, movies? Centuries ago the Egyptian desert inspired its people with an art so expressive that we still cherish it: who will meet the challenge of Arizona—a desert more varied, more richly painted, and cut to its granite heart with cañons? What poet will dare drink his nectar from the glacier, and seek out Alaska, smiling her brief summer smile between icebergs?

When we make these things our own, in spirit and truth, our art will cross the seas, and our poems be on all men's tongues.

H. M.

A POET'S DECLARATION OF RIGHTS

We have each a right to four lives. No one has the right to more or less than that.

The first life we have a right to is the life of work. Thankless grinding—that is what it comes to. It is cramming an engine each day with its fuel, so that it may go on grinding out something that is convertible into more fuel for its strength.

The second life we have a right to is the life of thought. How many steps in advance, and hurried retreats to the rear, must we have before we can attain to this life! How few really care to attain to it at all! For thought brings not peace, but a sword.

Our third right is the life of feeling and experience. Are we afraid of this life? Then let us turn from the arms that